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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Fifty-seventh year

Letter dated 5 March 2002 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People addressed to the Secretary-General

In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to draw your attention once again to the extremely alarming situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. Allow me to focus on some areas that are of particular concern to the Committee.

In the course of the past several weeks, the security situation on the ground has been steadily worsening. Daily, innocent civilians on both sides are killed and injured in unending violence. Since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa intifada, over 1,000 Palestinians and some 300 Israelis have lost their lives. In an effort to quell actions by Palestinian militants, Israel has resorted to fighter jets and helicopter gunships, heavy armour and the use of special army units. Shelling targets in densely populated areas, in particular in the Gaza Strip, has resulted in a considerable human toll and widescale destruction of residential and other buildings. Incursions into Palestinian towns and areas have now become "business as usual" for the Israel Defense Forces. In yet another worrying development, the Israel Defense Forces have made several incursions into Palestine refugee camps in Balata and Jenin in the West Bank and in Rafah in the Gaza Strip, leaving large numbers of dead and injured persons. In addition, the situation at Israeli checkpoints and roadblocks throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory has noticeably deteriorated. Over one week alone, we have witnessed several tragic incidents at roadblocks, with at least three cases involving pregnant women.

Recently, the Israel Defense Forces have stepped up attacks against the various elements of the Palestinian Authority. It has totally or partially destroyed scores of Palestinian Authority facilities, including its security and police installations, radio and TV stations, as well as Palestinian airport and naval facilities. Our Committee also strongly condemns the virtual house arrest of Chairman Arafat. This harsh measure against the leader of the Palestinian people should be lifted immediately.

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In the 18 months of the intifada, the economic deprivation of the Palestinian people has reached catastrophic proportions. Thousands of Palestinian families have been left without any source of income, increasingly dependent on emergency relief. The almost methodical destruction of towns, villages and agricultural lands has made large numbers of Palestinians homeless and has led to their internal displacement — a dangerous new development. Overall, we are witnessing the unfolding of a humanitarian crisis. It is incumbent on the international community to address this situation and provide the Palestinian people with the much-needed humanitarian assistance.

It has been said on many occasions and in various quarters that the conflict cannot be resolved by means of force. The parties must restore mutual trust through positive actions on the ground and bridge their differences through meaningful negotiations. In this context, the Committee welcomes and supports all initiatives leading the parties out of the present impasse towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. We, in the Committee, also fully agree with your assessment of the present situation and share the view that efforts at re-establishing security should be complemented by dramatic steps in the political and socio-economic areas. In the Committee's view, the work of the "Quartet", composed of representatives of the two co-sponsors of the peace process, the European Union and the United Nations, has acquired special importance and can indeed catalyse the broader international effort at bringing peace to the region. This is especially critical now, as the divide between the two sides appears to be rapidly growing. Innovative approaches and fresh ideas emanating from regional and extraregional parties are therefore necessary and should be encouraged. We all have to act now. The international community cannot afford to waste more time in the quest for peace in the Middle East.

However, in working for peace in the region, we should be acutely aware that no solution to the conflict could be found without addressing its core problem — the question of the continuing illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. To be successful, all peacemaking efforts should take this central premise into account. It is also clear that the Israelis and the Palestinians will only be able to enjoy peace and normality when the occupation becomes a thing of the past.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our Committee's position that the United Nations should maintain its permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Papa Louis **Fall**
Chairman
Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable
Rights of the Palestinian People